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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 003904

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [AE](#)

SUBJECT: UAEG SETS DATE FOR FNC ELECTIONS; CRITICISM OF
ELECTORAL PROCESS BY UAE INTELLECTUAL SET

REF: A. ABU DHABI 3877

[1](#)B. ABU DHABI 3641

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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Martin Quinn, Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On October 1, the Cabinet announced that the elections of one-half of the Federal National Council(FNC) will be held on December 16, 18, and 20. That same day, the National Election Committee published the names of the 6,689 member electoral college that will participate in the elections. The publication of the names of electors sparked public interest in the elections and debate whether the electors were representative of the population. Although the list of electors apparently draws from all segments of society, there were notable exclusions. While some electors were surprised to find their names on the list, other prominent UAE nationals have told us that although they were offered places in the electoral college, they declined noting that the elections were insignificant or merely a show to keep the USG happy. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) Elections for the FNC will be held on December 16, 18, and 20. In addition to setting the dates for the elections, on October 1, the Cabinet approved a general budget of USD 4.4 million (16 million dirhams) to manage the elections. The December elections will elect 20 members of the FNC (one-half) by an appointed electoral college consisting of 6,689 members (1,189 women). The announcement confirmed Embassy's previous understanding that only members of the electoral college are eligible to contest a seat for the FNC.(ref B)

DISAPPOINTED INTELLECTUALS AND "SOUR GRAPES"

[1](#)3. (C) Dr. Ebtisam Al-Kitbi, a Pol. Sci. professor at UAE University and board member of the UAE's only human rights organization, conducted a public seminar with Dr. Abdul Khaleq Abdulla, also a UAE University Pol. Sci professor and frequent op-ed writer in the Arabic daily Al-Khaleej, in Abu Dhabi on October 3 on the subject of the FNC elections. Al-Kitbi was harshly critical of the elections process stating that they did not represent "a real sign of democracy" since participation is limited, and the FNC has no real power. She added that the true test of the UAE leaders' resolve to introduce democratic change would come after the elections when the FNC takes up the issue of a constitutional amendment granting significant legislative authority to the FNC. Dr. Abdulla commented that the elections were significant because they represent "an important first step" towards free democratic elections in perhaps four or five years. Al-Kitbi's and Abdulla's comments were carried in all the major Arabic dailies. (Comment: Al-Kitbi herself is known to have expressed keen aspiration to be among the first

UAE women to serve on the Federal National Council. Post cannot help but wonder whether, if she had been named herself as an elector, her theme might be less one of "sour grapes." End comment.)

14. (C) On October 5, Al-Kitbi told PolOff that she was particularly critical of the list of electors and the apparent random fashion that they were assembled. Unlike Dr. Abdulla, who had publicly praised the list of names as broadly representative of society, including "grandfather, father, and son; poor and rich; civilized and Bedouin;" Al-Kitbi characterized the list as "apparently without selection criteria" and "as if chosen from the telephone directory at random." To illustrate her point she provided examples of entire families that were chosen, electors with criminal records, and at least one person who was certified deceased. Several op-eds in both Arabic and English dailies have wondered at the selection of the list of electors, noting that many of the electors themselves were surprised to see their names on the list(ref A).

15. (U) Mohamed Al-Hammadi, the head of the domestic news desk at Arabic Daily Al-Ittihad, wrote an October 4 op-ed praising the membership of the electoral college for including "all sects of society." He stated that even though the FNC elections are not truly democratic, the level of discussion that began immediately following the publication of the list of electors both illustrates that Emiratis are indeed interested in democracy and shows reason why the December FNC elections should be viewed as a "real step towards fully democratic elections."

"FIRST ELECTION)- LAST ELECTION"
AND KEEPING THE US HAPPY

16. (C) As noted reftel, some UAE notables have declined "the

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honor" of participating. Dr. Jamal Al-Suwaidi (Protect), Director of the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, told Ambassador and Econchief that he had been offered the opportunity to be an elector and run for a seat, but had declined. He noted that the elections meant very little in reality and opined that the UAE was undertaking them "to keep you (the USG) happy," adding, "first election -- last election." (Note: The elections have not been codified and there is no guarantee that there will be another election. The UAE Constitution provides that each FNC member's term lasts two years, and that each emirate may choose independently how its representative members are selected. End Note.)

17. (C) Comment: The list of electors is notable not only for the breadth of society that it includes, from young urban students to elderly Bedouin, but for the names of several prominent political and business leaders who were absent or excluded. None of the notable political intellectuals -- such as Dr. Al-Kitbi or Dr. Mohamed Ghobash -- were included.

Nor were prominent women leaders such as General Women's Union President Noura Al-Suweidi (said to have fallen from favor with Sheikha Fatima, Sheikh Zayed's widow and influential "Mother of the Nation"), or members of the UAE Business Women's board. The only member of the Emirates Human Rights Association named to the list is chairman Abdul Ghafar Hussein, although this may be due to his prominence in the Dubai Chamber of Commerce. (Note: Exclusion from the list of electors does not preclude any UAE citizen from being named to one of the remaining 20 FNC seats that will be filled by appointees following the elections. End Note.) End Comment.

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